

Date: April 25, 1974

Place: Lemoi's Hardware Store, Davis Street, Evanston Illinois.

Interview with: Tom Kees

Observations: Mr. Kees has been a clerk at Lemoi's for the past seven years after having spent fifty years working for the Northwestern Railroad. Hardly looks his age. The purpose of this first interview was to test John Drodow's hypothesis that the high school tended towards elitism, reflecting the character of the principal.

Q. Good morning, Mr. Kees.

A. Good morning. That's right, you wanted to talk to me. Well, if you'll wait one minute, and then I think that we can go over to the side there. (pause while he continued arranging a display) O.K. Now you wanted to know about Evanston.

Q. Actually I'm interested in Evanston Township High School during the time when the principal was Mr. Beardsley. I believe that that was in the late 'teens and early 'twenties...

A. Yes, I was a student then, but I don't know if I can help you much. I always had to work right after school.

Q. I know what you mean. I also used to work after school. In a hardware store, in fact, although it was somewhat larger than Lemoi's. I don't know if it was as well stocked, but we did sell a wider range of non-hardware items: housewares and toys, especially. Oh, and auto products: tires, batteries, cleaners, and garden products, too. Mowers, lawn tools. But never really fine woodworking chisels like these. As you might guess, I like hardware stores; feel at home in them.

A. Yes, I've been working here for the past seven years. Worked on the Northwestern Railroad before that, then retired and came here. 50 years on the Railroad.

Q. By the way, what is your full name?

A. Tom Kees, Jr.

Q. And your address?

A. Now I'm living at 3308 Culver. But I was born at 1310 Ashland, and then in, oh, well, my dad bought two properties at the corner of Wesley and Wilder. 1230-1234 Wesley.

Q. And when were you born?

A. February 6, 1901

Q. You don't look a day over forty-five. Have you lived in Evanston throughout your entire life?

A. Yes, except for work trips while working for the railroad.

Q. So you attended Evanston schools?

A. Yes. For grades one to four I attended the old Washington School, and my teacher was Mrs. White. Then I attended the Lincoln School at Main and Forest before they split up the district. The principal there was Mr. Nichols, the best man that ever lived. He was the principal of all three schools. They only had one principal then for all the schools. Lincoln,

Dewey, and Washington. Then later I attended the old Oakton School. That was in 1912. For High School, I went to the Evanston High School, That was on the corner of of Dempster and Elmwood. It burned down, though, while I was there. The both boys and girls went to the old Haven School. We were transplanted there as well as at stores, vacant stores in town. Wasn't the best conditions, but we made do.

Q. When did you enter high school?

A. I began--I attended in 1913 and 1914. They had eight grades of grammar school then four years of high school.

Q. Two years?

A. Some boys quit high school then. I quit because of the start of World War I. Yes, I quit so I went to work on the Northwestern Railroad. But my parents wouldn't approve my papers so I couldn't join the army. That's when I started on the railroad. Stayed there for 50 years.

Q. Mr. Keys, that's a long time of loyal service.

A. Yes, well, I enjoyed it. It was good work.

Q. When you were in high school, who was the principal?

A. That was Mr. Beardsley. He married my shorthand teacher Rutheta Hunt. That was after the war, I think.

During the war we had R.O.T.C. We trained on Elmwood, the boys did. We also dug trenches out near Prairie, near where Marks Manufacturing now is, where all those broadcast stations are. Like I said, some boys quit high school. I quit so I could join up, but my parents wouldn't approve my papers.

Q. Were your father and mother from Evanston?

A. Yes. My father was the superintendant of the Burnham Estate. Burnham, an architect. He was the architect of Burnham Park in Chicago. I used to work there also. I also used to deliver water on the water wagon with my sunday School teacher.

Q. Water wagon?

A. Not all places had piped in water then. Or clean water. So we used to deliver water. Delivered to all kinds of places.

Q. Work after school?

A. I think that I worked too much. I worked with four of five students. We were paid for cutting grass, washing, doing odd jobs. Before I started working for the railroad I was making good money, damn good money. I paid for all of the furniture before I got married at 21, and still had \$2000.00 in the bank.

Q. That's good for now. Back then it must have been very good.

A. It was important then, too.

Q. More or less than school, do you think?

A. (Chuckle, perhaps from conflict) Well, both were important, but with the war and all...

Q. One of the things I want to know is what the school program was like. What sort of courses they offered, what activities the school sponsored. What athletic programs, if any.

A. They had all sports. Ed Marrow was the basketball coach. No,

he was the baseball coach. We played a sort of indoor baseball next to Lord's (department store?) in the "Y". Mr. Bixby coached at the "Y", and he also coached Evanston Township Grammar School. If he pleased, we played ball at the "Y". At school, for baseball, Ed Marrow was the coach. I was not really interested in football. I had to work too much.

Q. Did the school have have any vocational training courses, like shop?

A. We had manual training in grammar school. In high school Rutheta Hunt taught Gregg and typing. (Interrupted by customer)

Q. ^(Store Business) Mr. Kees, things seem to be picking up a bit. I was wondering first of all if you knew of any other long-time residents of Evanston with whom I might speak?

A. Well, I don't know of anybody who could help you. You could try Mr. Darling of the Historical Society. That's down in the old Dawes Estate on Sheriden Road right next to the lake. That's one of the places where we used to deliver water. Mr. Darling should be able to help you.

Q. When I was in here before speaking to the black clerk, he told me that there was a Mr. Lemoi who is also a long-time resident.

A. That's right. Ralph Lemoi. He lives in Glenview now. He used to live right above the store. If you want to speak to him, though, you'll have to come in some morning around nine. He's old and is not feeling too well and doesn't spend much time here. But he comes in most mornings, though.

Q. One more question -- and I do appreciate all the time you've given me. You say that you're here every morning except Wednesdays. If I come in Saturday could we talk some more?

A. No, not on Saturday, no, much too busy.

Q. Monday?

A. Fine.

Q. So that you might be thinking about it, what I would like to talk about is the school program since we just began this time, and also Mr. Beardsley.

A. O.K.

